

PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF CHURCHES URGE GAZA CEASEFIRE IN THE HOLY SEASON DURING A MEETING WITH DIPLOMATS

In a gathering at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches along with Ambassadors, Consul-Generals and Representatives of diplomatic missions assembled to address the challenges faced in the Holy Land, especially in light of the approaching Christmas season. His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, opened the session with a message of hope and spiritual significance, invoking the words from the Gospel of Saint John. Amid the cordial atmosphere, the Patriarch urged for a ceasefire in Gaza, emphasizing the need to protect community service institutions.

Expressing concerns about the challenges faced by Christians in the Holy Land, including systematic attacks by radical Israeli groups, the Patriarch of Jerusalem called for preserving the multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious fabric of Jerusalem. He emphasized the importance of stability and secure Christian Quarters for the thriving coexistence of all residents. The Patriarch conveyed his wishes for a swift return of peace and a Christmas season marked by hope.

The gathering included discussions on the challenging situations in Gaza and Bethlehem. The Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, shared the dire circumstances in Gaza, emphasizing the importance of supporting those who choose to stay in the besieged Strip. The Custos of the Holy Land, Father Francesco Patton, stressed the effects of Israel's military closures and the subsequent

economic challenges in Bethlehem, underlining the significance of connectivity between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Various Christian spiritual leaders conveyed messages of peace and discussed pressing issues, such as the pressure on Christian schools to change their curriculum into an Israeli one, which was expressively articulated by the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, Husam Naom. The issue of the illegitimate Israeli municipal taxes over Church property was also highlighted, and the need for international support to navigate challenges faced by the Holy Land Christians.

In response, diplomatic representatives expressed support, with Jordan, the EU, Egypt, and France affirming their commitment to engagement and assistance. The meeting highlighted the urgent call for a ceasefire to ensure a peaceful Christmas celebration and reiterated the importance of diplomatic collaboration to address ongoing challenges in the Holy Land.

From Secretariat-General